

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6726

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SN

SUBJECT: ELECTION UPDATE

REF: SINGAPORE 5055

1. AS REPORTED IN THE STRAITS TIMES DECEMBER 10, THE PAP CONTINUED ITS ACTIVE PREPARATIONS FOR THE FORTHCOMING 10-DAY ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEGINNING DECEMBER 13 BY APPOINTING HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER CHUA SIAN SHIN AS CHAIRMAN OF ITS ELECTION COMMITTEE. THE FOLLOWING SLOGANS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE PROBABLY FORECAST THE CAMPAIGN THEMES TO BE STRSSED BY THE PAP: "ONLY THE PAP COULD BETTER 17 YEARS' RECORD", "YOUR FUTURE IS SAFE WITH THE PAPA", DEEDS NOT WORDS - THAT'S THE PAPA".

2. ALTHOUGH OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION MUST WAIT UNTIL NOMINATION DAY, THE STRITS TIMES HAS QUOTED INFORMED SOURCES AS SAYING THAT ALL OF THE PRESENT CABINET WILL SEEK SEATS FROM (A) THE FOUR NEWLY CREATED CONSTITUENCIES, (B) THE SEAT FORMERLY HELD BY WEE TOON BOON WHO RESIGNED FOLLOWING HIS CONVICTION FOR CORRUPTION AND (C) THE SEATS OF SIX MPS WHO WILL NOT SEEK RE-ELECTION. THE ONLY PERSONALITY OF ANY NOTE IN THIS LATTER GROUP IS PROFESSOR WONG LIN KEN WHO PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS AM-BASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES AND MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS.

3. MEANWHILE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS CONTINUED TO GIVE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO PRE-CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENTS. THE CHINESE
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LANGUAGE PRESS HAS BEEN MORE SUBDUED, FORUSING ON EXPLANATIONS

OF VOTING PROCEDURES AND AVOIDING EDITORIAL COMMENT. THE MALAY LANGUAGE BERITA HARIAN HAS REPEATED ARTICLES FROM THE ENGLISH PRESS AND IS BEGINNING TO COVER INDEPENDENTLY THE MALAY OPPOSITION. STRAITS TIMES GAVE FRONT PAGE BANNER HEADLINES TO LEE KUAN YEW'S JUSTIFICATION AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN KUALA LUMPUR ON DECEMBER 7 WHY THE PAP WISHES TO SWEEP EVERY SEAT IN THE ELECTION. LEE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING "WHEN WE FIELD CANDIDATES IN ALL CONSTITUENCIES, WE HOPE TO WIN IN THOSE CONSTITUENCIES. UNLESS THERE IS AN OPPOSITION WHICH IS LIKELY TO BE PRODUCTIVE AND SUBSTANTIAL, THERE IS HARDLY ANY POINT IN HAVING 'SCATTERED BRAINS' OPPOSITION." THE PM ADDED THAT HE WOULD RATHER HAVE THE PAP LOOKING AT ITSELF AND QUESTIONING AND ARGUING THEN USE A PARTY WHIP TO GET ITS POLICIES ADOPTED.

4. ASKED WHETHER HE WAS NOT GETTING WORRIED ABOUT THE ONE PARTY SYSTEM, LEE REPLIED IT MADE THEM ANXIOUS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED. HE SAID, "WE SHOULD NOT GET FLABBY. THE PAP MEMBERS ARE TAKING A CRITICAL VIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES. THE FACT IS THAT IN THE 1972 ELECTIONS WE WON ALL THE SEATS AND THAT HAS NOT MADE US FLABBIER."

5. THE STRAITS TIMES EDITORIAL OF DECEMBER 7 ANALYZED THE UPCOMING ELECTORAL BATTLE IN BLATANTLY PRO-PAP TERMS. AFTER NOTING "THE OVER OPTIMISTIC" WORKER'S PARTY LEADER JEYARETNAM'S CLAIM THAT 40 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE WOULD CAST THEIR BALLOTS AGAINST THE PAP, THE EDITORIAL CONCLUDED THAT "A MORE APPROXIMATE ESTIMATE TO THE PROBABLE TRUTH IS THAT THE PAP MAY BE PUSHED QUITE HARD IN A HANDFUL OF THE 69 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS." THE EDITORIAL CAUSTICALLY COMMENTED THAT THERE WAS NOT ONE OPPOSITION PARTY "REMOTELY CAPABLE OF PROVIDING AN ACCEPTABLE AND VIABLE ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT," AND WARNED THE PUBLIC THAT IT "WOULD BE DOING ITSELF A DISSERVICE IF IT DID NOT JUDGE ON THE ABILITIES OF THE CANDIDATES AND THEIR PARTIES TO REPRESENT THE COUNTRY AND WENT IN FOR NEGATIVE, SPOILING VOTING."

6. THE NEW NATION OF DECEMBER 7 PROVIDED A MORE RESTRAINED ASSESSMENT. AFTER NOTING THE EXCELLENT PAP RECORD FOR LEADERSHIP, THE EDITORIAL OBSERVED THAT THERE WERE ECONOMIC STORM CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON AND STRESSED THAT THEY "REQUIRE HANDLING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BY SOUND POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL MANAGERS... THE CARDS SEEM STACKED AGAINST THE OPPOSITION. HOWEVER, THEIR SQUABBLING ASIDE, THE OPPOSITION CAN STILL RELY ON THAT SECTOR OF THE ELECTORATE (30 PERCENT IN 1972) WHO DO HAVE GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE PAPA." REVIEWING THE WORKER'S PARTY PLATFORM, THE NN CONCLUDED THAT... "THESE CARROTS ARE BOUND TO APPEAL TO SOME. AS WOULD THE INEVITABLE - BUT IN OUR VIEW UNWISE- TENDENCY TO WANT SEATS ACROSS THE FLOOR IN PARLIAMENT OCCUPIED."

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